



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## ANCIENT JEWISH VIEWS OF THE MESSIAH

---

REV. PROFESSOR EDWARD A. WICHER, D.D.  
San Francisco Theological Seminary, San Anselmo, Cal.

---

### I

We do not speak of the messianic views of the Sadducees, because they had none. They had no belief in the kingdom of God as such, either in this world or that which is to come. Their doctrine left no place for a Messiah who would either exercise a moral authority in the world as it existed, or gather up into himself the eschatological expectations of his people in a glorious epiphany. And they could not believe in a merely national Messiah, because they could not see any possibility of defeating Rome. Their only fear was that some impostor messiah might arise and cause them to be deprived of the offices they held at the pleasure of their conquerors.

The Pharisees were the chief opponents of the Sadducees, and in the New Testament are usually mentioned with the scribes. The name means those who are "separated," that is, by a superior piety, from the common people, for whose ignorance they professed a profound contempt. Nevertheless, in religious matters generally they determined public opinion, and we will not unfairly assume that the messianic views of the Pharisees represented those of the common people, in so far as the latter had any definite views. While in common parlance the scribes and Pharisees were conjoined, these two names did not represent two coextensive groups. The scribes were the men whose work it was to interpret the law, while the Pharisees were the men who made it their chief business in life to embody the law in conduct. Thus while a scribe was usually a Pharisee, there were many Pharisees who for various reasons could not be scribes and were compelled to follow at a distance the interpretations given by the professed jurists and theologians.

Thus we may make a distinction within the school of the Pharisees, and divide its members into three groups, each marked by a more or less divergent conception of the character of the coming Messiah and

his kingdom—the scribes, the “meek and lowly,” and the fanatical Zealots, who afterward emerged from pharisaism and became a separate party in the nation. Not that these groups are always found sharply divided one from another, or that their views admit of no shading one into another; for all the elements of the pharisaic expectation blend in varying proportions in all the groups. But each of the types referred to is distinct; and it will conduce to clearness to hold them apart in our discussion.

“The scribes of the Pharisees,” who in the gospels are generally referred to simply as “the Pharisees,” were the learned and dominant element of pharisaism, the element that was continually in evidence during the public ministry of our Lord. The quietist Pharisees, “the meek and lowly,” while not conspicuous, were very numerous, constituting, as they did, the great bulk of the simple-minded, sincere followers of the religion of their fathers, who, like old Simeon, were “waiting for the consolation of Israel.” The Cananaeans, or Zealots, were the fierce nationalists, who had no patience with either the dreams of the apocalyptists or the legal disquisitions of the scribes, but who wanted the restoration of the sovereignty of Judah, and wanted it immediately. With each of these we will deal in order.

The position of the scribe, whose duty it was to collect and codify the law and expound its precepts, is thus set forth by Jesus: “The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat; all things therefore whatsoever they bid you, these do and observe”—a direction however which received important modification elsewhere in his teaching.

Scribism issued in the Talmud, and for the study of the messianic expectation of scribal pharisaism the Talmud is the most important source. If to this it should be objected that the Talmud gives us scribal Judaism of the time after Christ, we may answer with Baldensperger that religious conceptions are very tenacious and that what was written down in the Talmud was already largely present in the rabbinical teaching of the time of Jesus. Thus the tractates of the Mishna and the apocalypses of the earlier period supplement and illuminate one another. And in any case scribal Judaism is not the whole of Judaism.

The messianic view of the scribes of the Pharisees contained the following main ideas:

1. The Messiah was pre-existent. Tanchuma, Nasso 11 reads: "Before God created the world he created in order the thora, the throne of holiness, the sanctuary, the patriarchs, Israel, the Messiah, and repentance." In the Book of Enoch<sup>1</sup> we read: "And before the sun and the signs were created, before the stars of heaven were made, his name was named before the Lord of Spirits. . . . And for this reason has he been chosen and hidden before Him before the creation of the world and forevermore."

There has been considerable discussion as to whether the scribes of the time of Christ taught the actual or the ideal pre-existence of the Messiah. Weber says that by it an ideal pre-existence was meant, and illustrates his point by a reference to Ps. 72:17, "Thy name is eternal." He says:<sup>2</sup> "The sense is that it was God's will from eternity to create the Messiah and send him into the world; just as those also who were named with him as pre-existent, the fathers, the people of Israel, and the sanctuary, were not actual but present in God's eternal counsel of salvation." But Weber does not carry his citation far enough; for Yalk 1:23, in the haggada upon this very passage, uses words that seem to preclude the possibility of the reference being only to an ideal pre-existence. After stating his view, as given above, he adds: "According to another view only the thora and the throne of glory were [actually] created; as to the other [five] things, the intention was formed to create them."<sup>3</sup>

So far as the Book of Enoch goes the evidence is clear; it is the actual pre-existence that is taught.

2. The entrance of the Messiah into the world. It is doubtful whether scribism ever succeeded in bridging the gulf between the pre-existent Messiah and the earthly Messiah. Bertholdt endeavored to show that such connection had been established by maintaining the identity of the Messiah with the Memra, or Word, of rabbinism; but in this position he has not been convincing. It is probable that the true connection is to be found in the direction indicated by Baldensperger through the conception of the Son of Man. But this teaching belongs rather to apocalypticism than to scribism. So far as scribism goes we are left with a sudden appearing of the Messiah in the midst

<sup>1</sup> 48:3-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Jüdische Theologie*, p. 355.

<sup>3</sup> See Bittenwieser, *Jew. Ency.*, VIII, p. 510, art. "Messiah."

of the people. He had been born into the world, but hidden, until the fulness of the times was come. As Moses was hidden from the people until he suddenly emerged to power to lead them out of captivity, so might the Messiah even now be hidden; and later rabbinism would add, possibly hidden in Rome itself. The Messiah would come as a thief in the night. The Targum upon Micah 4:8 taught that the Messiah was already upon the earth, but because of the sins of Israel unable to come into her midst.

It is probably in connection with these silent years of unrecognized ministry that we are to set the Jewish doctrine of a suffering Messiah. It could not wholly escape the rabbis that suffering was an essential element in the character of the Servant of Jehovah, who moved through the later chapters of Isaiah, and was generally accepted as a messianic figure. But suffering was out of harmony with their system, it was an offense to their idea of the majesty of the coming One; and they were content to pass it over lightly and at length ignore it completely.

Delay there might be in his coming and a secret mission even after he was upon the earth, but whenever he should appear he would be a man, whose usual title was Son of David. In *Pesikta* 149*a* occurs this passage: "Blessed hour, when the Messiah was made! Blessed the body, out of which he went forth! Blessed the generation of those who see him! Blessed the eye that hath been accounted worthy to see him!" Here he is represented as being born of a woman, and thus entering upon his earthly existence.

The hopes of all Israel had for centuries been fixed upon the lineage of David. In the darkest hours of their national history his reign had been for them the golden age in the past; and, unquenchable hope reasserting itself, it had become the type and symbol of the golden age that was still to come. There could not fail one of his seed to sit upon the throne forever. Only for a little while under John Hyrcanus, when this ruler had won his great victory over the Syrian power and had not yet broken with the Pharisees, it seemed as though the Jewish hope could be divorced from the Davidic house. Then for a brief exultant period the pious Israelite imagined that the reign of Messiah had already begun upon the earth. In vivid anticipation of fast-approaching triumph, the author of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs

already beholds Beliar led captive in bonds, sin banished from the earth, the sword removed from the race of Adam, and the gates of Paradise opened. Then Levi almost usurps the messianic dignity of Judah, but not for long. The betrayal of the Pharisaic cause by Hyrcanus in 106 B. C. resulted in a final rupture between him and his former adherents and a revival of the hopes of a Davidic ruler. The later edition of the Testaments was a revision in order to restore in part to the Son of David the honor of which he had been deprived. But except for this one short period of defection Jewish literature shows us that the messianic hope is bound up with the lineage of David.

3. But if the Messiah is in his own person a purely human being, he is clothed with a superhuman dignity as the representative of the theocracy. He comes not of himself, but is called of God, who alone knows the time of his appearing. He is not himself the supreme ruler, but the vice-gerent of God upon the earth. The seventeenth Psalm of Solomon doubtless reveals to us the common idea of Israel, when the Messiah is represented as having Jehovah for his God and king, as reigning over the people of Jehovah so as to be a blessing to them, and as tending the flock of Jehovah as a shepherd. In some such way as this is his office conceived, but nowhere do we find anything that points to an independent action upon his part, or any assumption of divine majesty. It is Jehovah who sets him on his right hand and invests him with kingly honor.

This brings us to the question of the title Messiah, which is here used. It is not a characteristic title of the promised Savior in the Old Testament. It is not even specifically applied to him. Dan. 9:25, the one passage that some competent scholars have thought to contain such an application, is of doubtful interpretation and probably refers to Onias III. According to Ryle and James the first literary use of the name is probably to be found in the Psalms of Solomon, where it occurs three times (17:36; 18:6, 8). It now has reference for the first time, not to any actual reigning king, but to an ideal king who is to come afterward. But its implication here, as everywhere, is a king appointed by God, subject unto God, sustained and glorified by the power of God.

4. The great work of the Messiah is the redemption of Israel.

He is to be a Goel, a Vindicator, of his nation. He is to be a second Moses, leading his people out of the foreign bondage in which under one form or another they have writhed ever since the destruction of the temple under Nebuchadrezzar. The deliverance from Egypt becomes the type of the deliverance that is to be effected in the days of the Messiah. Specifically, the power of Rome is to be broken and the kingdom of the world is to be brought into subjection to the kingdom of heaven. In midrashic literature, such as the Book of Jubilees, Rome and the fate of Rome are sometimes glanced at under the name of Edom.

That he is to gather together into one in the land of Canaan all the scattered tribes is the burden of a large part of the Talmud as well as of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. One of the supreme blessings of the messianic reign would be the return of the wanderers to their land. The eleventh Psalm of Solomon discloses with moving power the Jewish longing:

Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, yea the holy trumpet of Jubilee.

Proclaim ye in Jerusalem with the voice of him that bringeth good tidings, that God hath had mercy upon Israel: he hath visited them.

Stand up on high, O Jerusalem: and behold thy children gathered from the East and West together by the Lord.

From the North they come in the gladness of their God: from the islands afar off hath God gathered them.

Lofty hills did he make low: yea even unto the plain before them.

The hills fled before their entering in, the woods gave them shelter as they passed by.

Every tree of sweet savor did God make to spring up before them: that Israel might pass by in the day when the glory of the Lord shall visit them.

Put on, O Jerusalem, the garments of thy glory: make ready thine holy apparel, for God hath spoken comfortably unto Israel, world without end.

The Lord performed that which he hath spoken concerning Israel and concerning Jerusalem.

The Lord raise up Israel in the name of his glory.

The mercy of the Lord be upon Israel, world without end.

And after the gathering of the tribes the temple is to be set up anew with holier sacrifices and more splendid ritual than ever in the past.

5. Closely connected with the expectation of the redemption of Israel is the doctrine of the resurrection. There are vast multitudes

of Israelites who have gone down to Sheol. Are they to have no part in the glories of the regenerated kingdom? The new reign must mean something for them also. They will be raised to behold the triumph of righteous Israel and the judgment of the oppressors. The dead who have awaited the redemption of Israel will be brought back from Sheol by the Messiah and restored to their temporal sphere of activity in this life. To the Messiah God gives the key of the awakening of the dead. The place where the resurrection will occur is the Holy Land. The trumpets will sound and they that are in the graves will hear and come forth. This is a resurrection for Israel alone. "And in those days will the earth also give back those that are treasured within it, and Sheol also will give back that which it has received, and hell will give back that which it owes. And he will choose the righteous and holy from among them, for the day of their redemption has drawn nigh."

It is however to be noted that the conception of the resurrection is by no means uniform or consistent. Sometimes it is a resurrection of all Israelites, sometimes only of the righteous Israelites, sometimes of pious gentiles also, and occasionally even of all mankind. The synagogues will then be no more hindered by the instruments of Satan, who will be bound.

In the doctrine of the resurrection the nationalistic ideas mingled, but were more or less subordinate to the distinctively religious conception.

6. His coming is to be attended with great signs and wonders, which will have their consummation in a great judgment. Wisdom will be poured out and glory will not fail before him forever. He will judge the secrets of the heart and no one will be able to utter a lying word before him. He will sit upon the throne of his glory and execute righteous judgment over the deeds of men, delivering the sinners up to tribulation and torment and exalting the righteous to a heaven of eternal light and blessing. But here too the conception wavers between a judgment at the beginning of the Messiah's reign and one at the close. Later Judaism settled the matter by accepting both.

7. The blessings of the Messiah's reign are a favorite theme with the apocalyptists. The following passage from the Apocalypse of



Baruch is of syncretistic origin and has been compiled from the compositions of a variety of writers:<sup>4</sup>

The earth also will yield its fruit ten thousand fold, and on one vine there will be a thousand branches, and each branch will produce a thousand clusters, and each cluster will produce a thousand grapes, and each grape will produce a cor of wine. And those who have hungered will rejoice: moreover, also, they will behold marvels every day. For winds will go forth from me to bring every morning the fragrance of aromatic fruits and at the close of the day clouds distilling the dew of health. And it will come to pass at the selfsame time that the treasury of manna will again descend from on high, and they will eat from it in those years, because these are they who have come to the consummation of time.

8. The place the gentiles will hold under the messianic rule is not very definite. There was indeed handed down in later tradition a clear rabbinical opinion that the Messiah's rule would displace the Roman empire in the world rule. And already in the time of Christ this idea was doubtless freely circulated in pharisaic teachings. This gives point to the proselytizing efforts of the Pharisees, some of whom at least looked for a universal ingathering of gentiles into the Jewish church. Others simply looked for an Israelitish overlordship, in which the laws for the nations would issue from Mount Zion. They even declared that as all Jews were to be restored to their homes and could not therefore participate in the government of the provinces, the governors must be gentiles acting under instructions received from Jerusalem.

But in any case, whether under one conception or another, the gentiles are to share in the blessings of the Messiah's kingdom. He will be a light to the gentiles and the hope of those who are troubled of heart.

9. Even after the establishment of the kingdom the Messiah will have another great struggle to undergo. The princes of the heathen world, sometimes referred to under the typical names of Gog and Magog, will not be content to remain under his rule, but will gather their forces for final warfare against Jehovah and his Messiah. But they will be defeated and bound. This war will close the earthly reign of the Messiah, judgment will be pronounced upon the guilty, and time will give place to eternity.

<sup>4</sup> Apoc. Baruch, 29 5-8.

10. The priestly element in the pharisaic conception might have had a more logical treatment earlier in our study, had it not been that in the time of Christ it had become so depressed and obscured under the other elements, that in thus deferring its consideration we are simply giving it the place which the typical Pharisee, if not in his doctrine, at least in his regard, would have been likely to give it. Yet the note of priesthood is a distinct one in Jewish literature, and was never completely lost until it was sounded full and clear in the writings of the apostolic church. In the splendid messianic hymn of the Testament of Levi, chap. 18, the priestly tone is fundamental.

Then shall the Lord raise up a new priest.  
And to him all the words of the Lord shall be revealed;  
And he shall execute a righteous judgment upon the earth for a multitude  
of days.

. . . . .

The heavens shall be opened,  
And from the temple of glory shall come upon him sanctification,  
With the Father's voice as from Abraham to Isaac.  
And in his priesthood the gentiles shall be multiplied in knowledge upon  
the earth,  
And enlightened through the grace of the Lord:  
In his priesthood shall sin come to an end,  
And the lawless shall cease to do evil.

In the Psalms of Solomon the Messiah is to expel "the sinners," i. e., the Sadducees, from the high priesthood to which they had no claim and upon which they had laid sacrilegious hands, and thereafter to exercise a priestly as well as a kingly function.

Such then in outline is the messianic hope of those Pharisees who had scribal inclinations and who occupied the central position in the religious life of the nation.